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P-White, Theodore H.
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the President
(orig under White)

The Making of the President 1972

By Theodore H. White

Atheneum. 391 pages. \$10

By DAVID S. BRODER

WHAT CAN YOU SAY about an election in which the incumbent President, scarcely bothering to campaign against crippled opposition, sweeps 49 of 50 states and then, long after the ballots have been counted, is discovered to have sheltered a criminal conspiracy inside his campaign?

You can say quite a lot—if you are Theodore H. White, four-fifths of the way through a contract to produce a narrative history of American politics in the five elections leading up to the nation's bicentennial. White has unloaded 371 pages worth of prose on the forgettable subject of the 1972 presidential "race," only 11 pages less than he devoted to the down-to-the-wire contest of 1960, when all of us were so much younger and more enthusiastic.

The "Making of the President" series has taken on a life of its own, a unique and, in many ways, valuable existence, but clearly now not dependent on the substance of its subject matter. What started as an exercise in journalistic history has become a force of history in itself.

It has changed the practice of political journalism in the United States. George Romney complained, with some justice, that he was the victim of a "Teddy White syndrome" when intense reportorial scrutiny of the early phases of his campaign ruined him in 1963. White has attracted an army of imitators. In 1960, he alone sat with the winning candidate as the convention roll was called and described the scene; in 1972, he was one of dozens of reporters and cameramen crowding into George McGovern's suite in a scene he

taste of the tourist who has discovered a secret cove one summer and returns the next year to find it overrun with picnickers.

But White has done more than change the way politics is reported; his books have apparently changed history. As White tells it, the idea of running for President first occurred to McGovern—when else?—while reading "The Making of the President 1960" in a hospital bed in the fall of 1962. That's power, all right.

As a piece of the series, "The Making of the President 1972" stands very close to the top. It is a better book than the 1968 installment, when the emotions of that

bloody year proved too much for White's romantic spirit to handle. It may be as good as the 1960 book, when the technique was arrestingly new.

White's great asset, throughout this epic effort, has been his command of the storyteller's art. What he says in this book in defense of presidential primaries could be applied equally to his books: "Their value could be described most simply as the value of narrative instruction, which is the best kind of instruction. Primaries tell a story"—and so does Teddy White.

As he demonstrated in the first chapter of the first book—the counting of the returns on election night in 1960—no one is his master at handling the theatrics of a political set-piece. His chapter in this book on the Democratic convention is another storyteller's masterpiece—done with superb rhythm and pace, mixing vignettes, changing perspectives and coming to just the right curtain line.

You have to take White on his own terms. He is a romantic. In that Democratic convention chapter, I gagged a little when I read that Miami Beach in the summer of 1972 was a place where "the green waters still caressed the clean beaches from which the sun-bleached white hotels rose like latter-day Taj Mahals." If that is true, it's the biggest exclusive anyone filed from convention city; and, frankly, I didn't think even Teddy White would use that line after what Norman Mailer did to the Beach in his book four years ago.

But we have all of us, as readers, come to know what to expect from White—and to value it. The 1972 mixture is as before: a great panorama of scenes and events, mixed with some pop sociology (here represented by an artful translation of the 1970 census findings) and a lot of "inside glimpses" of the great men at work and play.